19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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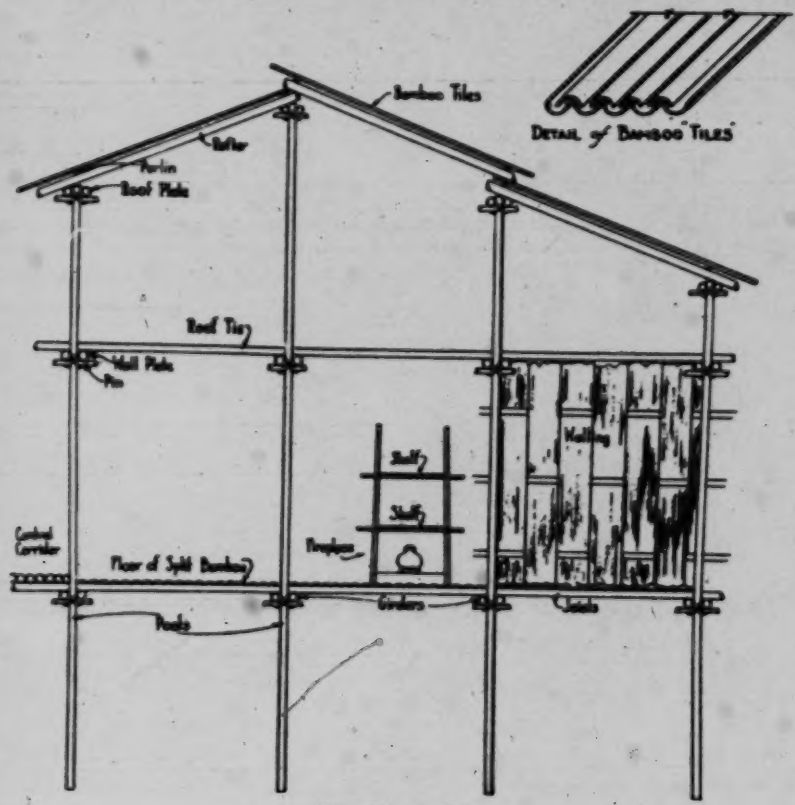
their mistress's voice. When a woman dies, her pigs are killed in order that their "k' las" may accompany her into the next world. The fowls are of a variety not unlike the wild jungle-fowls found all over the country.

On the plains buffaloes have been extensively bred for use as draft animals and in cultivating the paddy-fields. As they are slow-going creatures the small native oxen, often mistakenly identified with the "sacred ox" from having a hump like the cattle supposed to have been used in ancient Israel, have largely superseded them for draft purposes. In the Toungoo Hills oxen are employed to some extent as pack-animals, especially by the Paku tribe. Both the Paku and their neighbors, the Mawnepgha, raise a few goats, while the Red Karen are breeders of ponies to some extent.



Side View of
A Bamboo Karen House
Kamedagyi 1917

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on them. Meat in excess of immediate needs is cut into narrow strips and dried on a rack over a fire. The strips are then covered with salt and stored away for future use. Fish are dried in the same way. Such preserved foods are eaten by the workers in the fields or help to furnish forth the repasts on a journey. In the hills, so far as I have observed, the Karen does not fry his food; but on the plains, where he has more or less taken up Burmese ways, cooking food in fat has become somewhat common. This is usually done outside the house, however, because the Karen, like the Burmese and Shan, have a superstitious fear of the smell of cooking.

While cooking is preeminently the women's work, it seems that nearly every man can cook and does on occasion prepare his own food. I have eaten many a tasty meal prepared by Karen men, who considerately took pains to have clean utensils and to use only such condiments as they knew white men were likely to relish.

The serving of food among the Karen is a simple matter. The rice is emptied into a tray, the meats or vegetables are put in little bowls, and all are set on a mat on the floor. The members of the household squat around this "family board" and eat with the hand. They pour gravy from the meat, fish, or other side-dishes on the rice, work it in with the fingers, and convey the food in compact lumps to their mouths. Among the more primitive large plantain leaves often serve as trays and plates. The Karen on the plains use separate dishes of china or enamel-ware, which are readily obtained in the bazaar. These are set on a low table, standing no more than six inches above the floor. This manner of serving is in vogue among the Burmese. There is not much sociability about a Karen meal. Each person attends to his eating until he has finished, when he rises, rinses off his hands, quenches his thirst with a drink of water, and withdraws to sit down, or leaves the house without formality. The members of a family generally eat together; but if guests are present, the women usually wait until the men are served. Large quantities of food are prepared for wedding and funeral-feasts, which, as a rule, the men and women partake of separately without particular order or arrangement.

The safety-match is nowadays the common means employed by Karens in producing fire; but formerly the flint and steel were used, as they were all over the world in the early days of the nineteenth century and before. A simpler, and probably indigenous, method was by the friction of two dry pieces of bamboo. One

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CHAPTER XX

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

When a Karen is ill, his sickness is thought to be due to some action of the malevolent spirits of the unseen world or to the wandering of his "k'la" (life principle or psyche). His malady may be due to an accident, an attack of indigestion after eating too many green mangoes, or an infection of some sort; but, according to his belief, some invisible spirit has been offended by a slight and is the real cause of his disorder.[1]

The seven-fold "k'la," which presides over the life of every person from the time of his birth, will, the Karen believes, determine the time and manner of that person's death. Notwithstanding the fact that one or another of the many causes of death will sometime effect the dissolution of every member of the race, the Karen makes offerings to delay as long as possible the inevitable end. Most propitiatory feasts require the presence of every immediate member of the family, in order to render the feasts acceptable to the spirits. If the sick person seems to be sinking, his relatives will all remain and try to be at hand when he breathes his last.

Karen funerals are by no means solemn occasions. On the contrary, they afford the greatest opportunity for the people to enjoy themselves. I have heard it said that when a considerable time has elapsed since a death in a particular region, the young people long for someone to die, so that they may have a jolly time. The question has often been raised why the Karen, who are not without family affection, conduct themselves in what to Occidentals is a very unseemly manner at the funerals of their dearly beloved ones. Possibly some light is thrown on this question by the story of the fabulous White Python. According to this story, after the python had been compelled to release "Naw Mü E," it took vengeance by killing men in great numbers by discharging its venom on their footprints. It took pleasure in hearing of the suffering and sorrow it was causing the human race and, therefore, redoubled its efforts. The peo-

[1] See Chapter XXIII, pp. 228-245, and Chapter XXIV, pp. 249-254, 257.

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764 773 ple, fearing lest they should become extinct, sought to overcome the python by guile. They determined to try the plan of deceiving the serpent and its menials by ostentatious feasting and festivity when a person died through its malevolence, instead of mourning over the victim. This subterfuge proved to be successful, for the servants of the python reported to their master that the people were no longer succumbing to its poison, but were rejoicing over their newly won immunity. At this the enraged serpent discharged all of its venom and thereby lost the power it had formerly possessed of causing the death of human beings.

761 This tale reveals the Karen's profound fear of the mysterious causes of death. He is unacquainted with the modern sciences of physiology, pathology, hygiene, etc. Some unknown power removes his parents or his children, and he strives to fortify himself against it. The White Python of the tale typifies the evil spirits, who are continually lying in wait for him and the members of his family. His object seems to be to counteract their baneful influence, even in the hour of its manifestation, by concealing his sorrow and indulging in ceremonial feasting and forced hilarity. Such appears to be the significance of the story of "Naw Mü E" and the fabulous White Python.

764 The people have their own explanations of their mode of conducting funerals. One is that certain of their sports assist the spirit of the departed to avoid the pitfalls in his path as he journeys from this world to his proper place in the next. They are employing the appropriate means "to make his way cool," as they express it. Being inhabitants of a tropical region, the word "cool" is the Karen's synonym for comfortable and pleasant. Another explanation given by the Karen for his method of conducting funerals is that he aims to cheer the hearts of those who are bereaved. Being without a solace to overcome the sting of death, the mourners are the more ready to fill their minds with such absorbing sights and sounds as will expel the sad remembrance of their loss. The reaction comes later, but the Karen's habit of living in the present has enabled him to reduce that to a minimum.

When a person dies, the relatives, if not all present, are immediately called by sounding the big bronze drum or "klo a' ko" (the hot drum or drum of discomfort). The pounding of this drum communicates to everyone within hearing the news that a death has taken place, just as the tolling of a church bell in the early days of New England carried the tidings of death to the villagers. For a

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short time the relatives indulge in weeping, but soon begin to prepare the corpse for burial or cremation. 764

On the plains the body is bathed, but not in the hills. East of Moulmein on the Siamese border the face is brushed over with an infusion of acacia pods and tumeric for the purpose, as the people assert, of washing it and giving the soul a good start. They then repeat the following words: "You have gone on before. We have been left behind. May it also be well with us." As a receptable for the body the Bwe and some of the other hill-tribes about Toungoo used to hollow out a log coffin, as do the Chinese. But by far the greater number of the Karen wrap the body in a mat. While preparing this mat they offer a brief prayer: [539]

"Let the shade of the dead depart.
Let the corpse of death and hades sleep on this mat.
Approach not. Come not near."

The two thumbs and the two great toes are tied together, but the string with which they are bound is immediately cut. After a blanket has been spread over the mat the body is placed on it and wrapped up in the two coverings, which are bound around at three places with red and white rope. These bands are connected by another rope running lengthwise of the body, which serves as the means of lifting and carrying the corpse. A bamboo water-joint and a betel-box [2] are placed upon the body, and the following words are spoken: "Chew your betel. Smoke your cigar. May your body eat, and may your 'k'la' eat as well." In Shwegyin those in attendance about the corpse address it, saying: "Do not take the path leading into the forest. Return to your resting-place and your pleasant home." Then they put the body in the guest-room and, having cooked rice and a duck curry, they place a portion of this food by it and say: "If your spirit and your 'k'la' have not departed, may they come and eat." Meantime, the beak, wings, and legs of the duck are dried a little by the fire and laid by the corpse, the following words expressing their purpose in so doing: [539] [539]

"Let the beak become a canoe for him.
Let the wings become his sail,
And the legs, his paddles." [539]

Placing two bits of liver on the eyes of the corpse, they utter the wish: "May these become bright eyes for you, to see clearly your way as you go back."

[2] For an account of betel chewing see pp. 72, 73.

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In some sections of the country the village elders try to keep the children away from the dead, lest their "k'las" should be induced to follow its "k'la." In order to divert the attention of the latter from prevailing on the shade of some living person to follow it, the elders pretend to pick up fruit about the room where the body is lying and to put it into the skirts of their garments.

In the Pegu Hills it is customary to prepare a bier for the body. This is a low bamboo frame ("thi hso law") with a bamboo framework above, over which a blanket or several garments are spread to form a canopy ("ta t' su"). By this means the spirit is supposed to be assured a cool and shady journey to its next abode. The body is usually kept only from one to three days, at the end of which time bits of the finger and toe-nails are pared off and a lock of the hair is cut to be placed in a tiny mat and substituted for the corpse during the remaining days of the funeral rites, and the "mourners" march around them as they would around the corpse itself.

A ceremony, called "ta le me" or the lighting of the way, takes place in the evening. The Karen people seem to think of the realm of death as quite the reverse of this world. I have sometimes thought that they locate it beneath the earth, but am not sure whether they ascribe a location to it or not. Their conception of the conditions prevailing in the other sphere as opposed to those existing in this one, is shown by the following observance: Two young men take their places on opposite sides of the corpse, one holding a candle between his first and second fingers, as a cigar is held, the palm of the hand being downward. He passes the candle to his fellow, who passes it back, the recipient taking it between the third and fourth digits. The candle is then thrown down beneath the house, while the young men raise their hands and point to the sky, saying to the corpse: "The roots of your trees are there," and then to the ground with the words: "There are the tops of your trees." Pointing in the direction of the source of the neighboring stream, they call it the mouth of the river and then pointing to its mouth, they speak of it as the source.

After this the company file around the body, chanting a "hta" (poem) to the sun. In Siam it is the custom to march around to the left, making the circuit three times, after which the participants begin to recite the following version of this "hta," entitled "The Face of the Sun":

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"The sun is dark; dark is the sun.
The moon is dark; dark is the moon.
The face of the sun is black. We point to the plantain.
The tops of your trees are the roots.
The mouths of your rivers have become their sources."

"The face of the sun shines.
The sun rises and reveals himself.
The moon ascends and displays herself.
They sink into the great river,
Setting among the fragrant flowers,
Where the perfumes are most satisfying."

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No regular order of funeral ceremonies appears to be observed throughout the Karen country. Not only do different tribes have their particular customs, but also various groups within the same tribe differ more or less from one another. This wide variety of rites renders it almost impossible to ascertain what the original customs were. On the plains, where the Karen have come into contact with the Burmese, the old customs have largely disappeared and are known only through the reports of old men. Even in the hill-country some of the ancient customs have been discontinued, so that one rarely sees a funeral nowadays at which all of the rites mentioned in this chapter are observed.[3]

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Nevertheless, it seems to have been a universal custom for the elders to take a leading part in the ceremonies by chanting a poem in which they declare that the spirit of the deceased has left this sphere for another and a better life in the spirit-world. A poem of this import is still recited in Siam and is probably not widely different from that which was familiar to the various tribes in the early days. It runs as follows:

"On the other side of the great river [4]
The apes call loudly to each other and cry.
They cry, 'tis said, because death comes so readily:
Men vanish like water rolling from the caladium leaf;[5]
They enter life suddenly and die quickly.
One by one they tread in the steps of God's sons.
They return whence they came as attendants of God;
They spread his mat and roll his cigars."

[3] At a funeral which the writer attended in the Pegu Hills in 1917 only a few of the elders, and a young man who had come from Papun, could repeat the "htas" which were used in the ceremonies. The young folks of the village itself could only be persuaded to take part after much talking, and then they appeared to be ashamed and shy. Only one night did they attempt to recite the poems, and the next morning the corpse was taken out through the side of the house and carried to the burial place where, they told me, no further rites were observed.

[4] This fabulous great river is supposed to separate this world from the next.

[5] A drop of water rolls from the axil of a caladium leaf like a drop of mercury.

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"The Lord of death, does his work swiftly.
The servants of Death are prompt in their task.
By the light of dawn they sharpen their spears.
In the ev'ning glow they whet them again.
They ponder where they will go to fight.
They choose whom they will overcome.
They steal through the vales and over the hills.
They vanquish the sons and daughters of men.
Into the huts of the poor, among the fowls,
Into the great houses and into the guest-rooms,
Where the oblations of brass and silver are seen
And the fowls are killed and offered, they come."

"Go, kill a black chicken.
Prepare it and offer it.
Go forth, and offer it on the main road,
At the intersection of the main roads.
If the curious person should eat it,
We would say that our grief has gone to him;
That he has carried it a great distance.
Let not evil's combings fall on us.
Let them fall 'midst the trees of the woods
Or elsewhere: the country is spacious."

Other verses are chanted, among them the following taken from what is known as a great poem ("hta mo pgha"):

"In the beginning when men first worked,
They toiled as their discernment led them.
From the beginning they worked for you;
They worked; they talked; they chanted."

A small poem ("hta hpo") supplies its lessons also:

"No more will you wear the beads,
But be draped in tendrils of the banyan.
Instead of the jacket and loin-cloth
You will wear the leaves of the banyan.
Go hence, eat the sour fruit of hades
And honey from the comb of the bees."

"Go, eat the salt fruit down in hades.
Go before and eat of the honey.
The dead, who face toward the ridge-pole,
Leave all of their children behind them.
They die and must look up the ladder,
But leave all their labor behind them.
Their death makes life not easy for us:
They send us on many an errand;
Our feet and our backs become weary."

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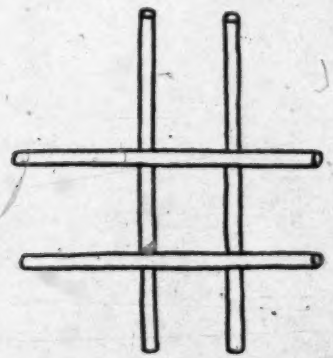
764 538 Many are the poems that are chanted during the nights of the funeral-feasts. The Karen divide them into various groups, such as the great poems ("hta do"), which are their nearest approach to our classical epics; the small poems ("hta hpo"), which are less dignified than the former; the poems of hades ("hta plü"), in which the words and sentiments are often in keeping with the character of the deceased, praising the respected and condemning the dishonored; poems showing Death the way back to his abode ("hta thwe plü"); poems for the king of hades, in which his name, "Hkü Hte," is mentioned in every line, while in one ("hta yeh law plü") of this group the Karen name for hades is as often repeated; extempore verses ("hta na do") sung in rhyming contests on the last night of the funeral-feasts between the most skillful improvisers of the companies from the different villages represented, and, finally, the love poems, in which the story of the romance between the lover and the maiden is chanted by the leaders of the groups of the young people.

764 524 The funeral observances held during the daytime are as boisterous as those held at night. Several of the former consist of jumping the pestles ("ta se kle"). The pestles are the stout sticks with which the hulls are pounded from the rice in wooden mortars, but bamboos are frequently substituted for these in the jumping games about to be described. Four of the pestles or bamboos are placed on the ground in the manner indicated by the accompanying illustration, and four young men take their stations on the sides of the figure thus formed, grasping the ends of the sticks. Three times in succession they knock the pestles on the ground and the fourth time they knock them together. While this is going on a fifth young man jumps in between the projecting ends of the parallel sticks, first on one side, then on another, and the fourth time into the center of the square and out again, if possible, before they are clashed together. The game requires quickness of action and produces great merriment, especially when the jumper's feet are caught. Should they be caught, his failure to



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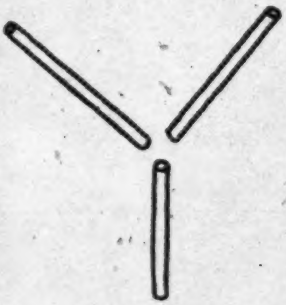
clear the sticks is regarded as a bad omen, showing that the spirit of the dead man has encountered some obstacle on its journey to its next abode. It is, therefore, incumbent on the jumper to try the center leap over again until he gets through safely.[1]

The next game in order is that of "pounding the pestles" ("ta to kli"). In this game three young men, each provided with a pestle or bamboo stick, take their places at equal intervals about a central spot on the ground, which forms the target at which they strike in turn. A fourth youth must jump first from one side and then another to the center and out again before each stroke falls, and the fourth time also when the wielders of the sticks strike together. In this game the jumper runs considerable risk of getting hit on the feet, unless he is very spry in his movements.



A third game with the pestles is called "stretching the neck" ("ta leh kah"). The four pestles required in this game are held in "criss-cross" fashion as in the first jumping game, but as high as one's shoulders. A young man stands beneath them, and another stands at one corner waving a naked sword above them. The four holding the ends of the pestles strike them together at brief intervals, while the youth beneath them must thrust his head up between the ends of the sticks and withdraw it again before they close about his neck, or the swinging sword touches him. Having done this on three sides in succession, the fourth time he must attempt it through the square in the middle. If he is successful in making the circuit three times without getting "his neck stretched," the assembled company are entitled to feel satisfied that it is well with the soul of the departed.

"Climbing the fruit tree" ("htaw the tha") is a very different kind of game from those described above, involving no physical risk inasmuch as it is a performance in pretending. A conventionalized picture of a tree with a knot part-way up the trunk, two

[1] Dr. Nieuwenhuis tells of a rice-pounder dance in Borneo performed by the women, who skip into the center and out again between the simultaneous strokes of the rice pestles. This dance is not unlike the funeral game described above. He also shows a picture of wrestling in Borneo, a sport evidently conducted like wrestling among the Karen. See plate 13, p. 137 of Dr. Nieuwenhuis's *Quer durch Borneo* (Leyden, 1907).

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764 524 pairs of side branches and a central branch, each terminating in two twigs bearing a fruit and leaves, is drawn on the inside of a winnowing-tray. (See page 203.) Betel-nuts or small coins are laid on the sketch to represent the fruit. The man designated to "climb the tree" must receive his instructions from a woman sitting opposite. He begins by asking her: "In climbing the tree, how shall I go up?" To which she replies: "Go up to the big knot." Question and answer follow until he has passed his hand from point to point to the tip of a twig, secured the fruit there, and brought it to earth. This is repeated over and over again, in a way that would prove insufferably tedious to a Westerner, until the last fruit has been gathered. The assembled Karens seem never to tire of this game and regard it as a kind of offering to the departed friend.

A ceremony ("ta w maw") participated in by both the young men and maidens is that of blowing bamboo tubes, rattling bangles, and parading or prancing, rather than dancing, around the corpse. In Shwegyin this ceremony is performed at night. In other places it used to be performed in the daytime at the place of burial, but has largely disappeared in recent times. The young men cut for themselves pieces of small bamboo with the joint in the middle, leaving the ends open, and, provided with these, take their places around the corpse alternating with the maidens, who wear bangles of little round bells or rattling seeds on their wrists. The participants, now facing towards the body and now away from it, parade around it, keeping step to the mingled but pulsating tones of the whistles or open tubes blown by the men and the rattle of the bangles on the swinging arms of the girls. At the end of this noisy parade the men tear their bamboos open with their teeth and throw them down with a loud shout, in which the girls join while shaking their arms vigorously. The spirit of the dead, when it hears this shout, knows that its welfare has not been forgotten by the friends remaining behind and believes that it will be able to avoid all demons along its path. The friends expect this ceremony to speed the departed on his journey.

If the deceased is a very old person who has left all of his children and grandchildren married and with homes of their own, a special observance is celebrated in his behalf. This is called the "taw kwe tah" or the "taw klaw taw." I am not able to interpret these terms. Nowadays the ceremony is very rarely observed, and in the earlier times it seems to have been observed on the plains, but

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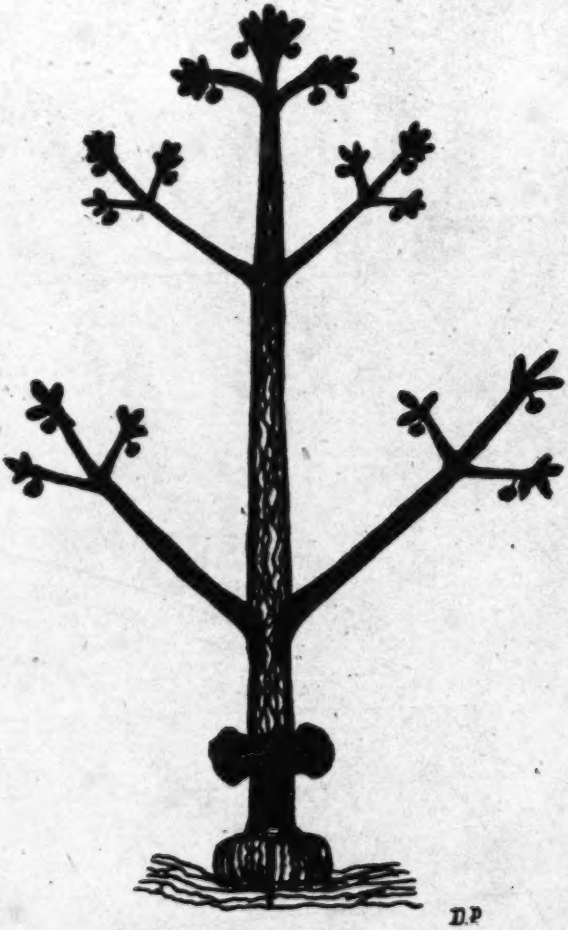
not at all in the Pegu Yomas. I have been told that on one occasion when this ceremony was to be performed at Letpadan, those concerned had to get permission from the township officer there and



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A Sketch of a Tree Used in the Funeral Games

that they spoke of it as "collecting taxes for the soul." A company of young men disguise themselves, several of them in women's costumes and carrying fish-nets, one as a blind man, and another as a lame one. They circulate among the neighboring villages with much shouting and laughter, calling on the inhabitants to contribute sun-

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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764 524 dry supplies. The members of the party who are impersonating women, go under the houses and pretend to catch fish in their nets. By such methods they manage to gather all they can carry of fruit, vegetables, and other kinds of food, which they consume on their return to the place where the funeral is being held. This ceremony is performed more frequently when the bones of the deceased are exhumed than at the time of his death.

764 761 After the ordinary daylight observances and the chanting of the poems in the evenings have been completed, the body is removed through an opening made for the purpose in the side of the [342] house and is carried to the place where it is to be burned or buried. In the olden days it was usual to burn the body, but latterly burial is the common practice. The children used to be confined or tied [859] up at home during the removal of the corpse. This was to prevent their being scared by the gruesome sight, thus causing their shades or "k'las" to withdraw from their bodies and make them sick, or to keep their "k'las" from being enticed to follow that of the dead person with the same result.

764 775 In Siam three beds of leaves and twigs are made along the path to the place of burning, the bearers stopping at these piles as though to put down their burden and rest, but allowing it barely to touch the bed when they raise it again and go on.

In those cases in which burning is resorted to, the body is placed upon a pile of fagots three or four feet high and more wood is piled on top. Dry bamboo torches are applied at two or more places and, after the fire is blazing, the body is pierced with long sharpened bamboos to allow the juices to exude and so hasten the process of incineration. Before the body has been wholly consumed, charred pieces of the bones and particularly of the skull are raked out, held near the fire, and addressed with the words: "If you are hot, sit by the fire." After this water is poured over them and they are told, if cold, to bathe and drink water. These injunctions to the bones again illustrate the curious conception on the part of the Karen that the conditions prevailing in the next world are just the reverse of those existing in the present one.

If the full funeral rites have been performed, the bones are ready to be deposited in the family burial-ground. If, however, the cremation has taken place before the performance of the full ceremonies, the bones are usually placed in a basket or wrapped in a cloth and taken home to be used again when the full rites are celebrated. This carrying home of the relics and celebrating a funeral

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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764 775 later is called "ta hu taw pgha a' hki." It is done both on the plains and in the hills. If the person dies in the rainy or the harvest season, the practice is to dispose of the body quickly and hold the burial rites, namely, the games and recitation of the poems or "htas" at a more convenient time.

764 774 On their way back from the burning-place the people stop at intervals, look back, wave their hands, and call out: "Pru-r-r k'la, come back, come back." They are summoning their own "k'las" to keep them from remaining behind with that of the dead person. In order to prevent the "k'la" of the deceased from following after them, they set up branches of trees in the path, which is their method of warning friends not to take a certain path. In Siam the funeral party resort to the additional precaution of opening the trunk of a big rotten tree in the jungle the next morning and summoning the "k'la" of the deceased to abide in that. Having provided an offering of rice and water for the nourishment of the spirit here, they address the tree as follows:

[539] "O Rotten Tree, you know hades and the land of the dead.
Be kind enough to show the deceased the way thither."

764 But few localities are left where the Karen still keep up their old burial-places. These localities are in the hills and on the eastern border of Burma. In these regions an elder of the bereaved family, who is familiar with the burial-place, takes the bones and valuables of the deceased, such as beads, ornaments, etc., to the spot and deposits them with the ashes of his ancestors. A man in the employ of a timber contractor told me of a chance visit made by him to one of these sacred burial-places. With a Karen driver he was in search of a working elephant that had strayed away. After crossing two or three mountain ridges and the intervening valleys, the Karen remarked that they were approaching his ancestral burial-spot and consented to lead his companion to it. They climbed to the top of the next ridge, where the ground was covered with huge boulders. Threading their way among these, they emerged into a grassy plot in the midst of which lay a boulder larger than the others, and, after clambering to the top of this rock, they found therein a deep hole in which the family relics of the elephant driver were deposited. His companion thrust the shaft of his spear nearly its whole length into the hole, the mouth of which was not more than four of five inches in diameter, and, poking about, could hear

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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764 the jingling of silver, probably bracelets, beads, rings, and other jewelry. It is said that hollow trees and the limestone caves that are so common in the hills of Burma and Siam, contain many such hidden treasures. In the Pegu Hills the people appear to bury the relics of their dead wherever fancy dictates and to pay no further attention to the spot. Indeed, as a whole the Karen raise no monuments over their dead. When the remains of a woman are buried, not only her trinkets and ornaments are buried with her, but also her pigs and fowls which, as her peculiar property, are killed and deposited with her relics.

766 775 Both in the hills and on the plains it is the custom to dig up the bones of the dead who have been carried off by epidemics, as well as of those who have died at inconvenient times, and hold ceremonies over them. It is said that in Shwegyin December ("La plü"), which is the month of eclipses and of the dead, is the time when these ceremonies are usually performed. On the plains the months of the hot season are those chosen for these rites.

When the bones are brought back to serve as the center of the burial ceremonies, they are placed in a little basket and set within [346] a small enclosure. In the Pegu Hills they are put under a small canopy, but on the plains the receptacle for them is made in the form of a miniature pagoda ("hko so law") or a little hut ("hko saw"). The hut is a model of a house with its ladder, water pots, etc. The basket containing the bones is put into the hut, and one end of a string is tied to the basket and the other let down into a water jar under the miniature house. This arrangement makes it possible for the "k'la" of the deceased to go down for a drink whenever it is thirsty. Early in the morning one of the elders carries a firebrand out to the hut, which is usually situated outside of the village. There he lifts out a piece of the bone and heats it with the glowing brand, saying: "If you are hot, sit by the fire." Then he pours water over it and tells it to drink and bathe, if it is cold. This he does in turn with each fragment of the bone. Finally, he puts the firebrand under the hut, calls back his own "k'la," and returns home. On top of the hut an image of a parrot is left, in case the deceased is an unmarried person; but for married persons two such images are set up. These birds are supposed to help carry the spirit of the deceaseed to its next abiding-place. As long as the bones are in the hut the friends take food to the "k'la" every day.

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766 775 the string. Hence, offerings of food must be continued to prevent the "k'la" from exercising its enticing power on that of some living relative.

[774 858] The "k'las" of the children are thought to be especially susceptible to such influence, and among the Bwes extraordinary precautions are taken to protect the children. The Bwe grandmother, who is head of the "Bgha" feast, wraps a pair of fowls in a number of garments, each of her grandchildren supplying one. She then calls back the spirits of the children to prevent them from being attracted by the "Mü xa." After the necks of the fowls have been wrung their flesh is eaten by the family, while the "Mü xa" are supposed to feed upon the essence of the chickens.

766 858 The Karen bury their children soon after death, and seem to take no further notice of their passing. When parents have had the misfortune to lose several of their offspring shortly after birth, they believe that the spirits from some vague region have sought mortal birth through their instrumentality, simply to gain the ornaments and trinkets that Karen are in the habit of giving to their children. Having secured these coveted possessions, the spirits return to their former abode with their undeserved rewards. The Karen call this fleeting existence "ta plu aw ka," which means "gaining something by entering life." Parents thus taken advantage of, as they feel, have recourse to a revolting method of terrifying a spirit of this greedy type. After a child has died and been carried to the burial-place, the indignant father thrusts a spear or sword through and through the little body or slashes it with a "dah," that is, a long knife, in the hope that the spirit, seeing how badly its temporary mortal tenement is being treated, may fear to come back again.

● 764 534 Our study of funeral customs among the Karen shows that, in the case of adults at least, funerals are festal and feasting occasions. Much rice and pork curry are consumed and, in the olden time, liquor flowed freely. In earlier times when people of different villages met at a funeral, a spirit of rivalry was shown in the improvising and chanting of the poems and sometimes in other ways. I have in my possession an old bronze funeral drum, which was reputed to be the sweetest sounding drum in the hills at the head of Thonze Creek.* On its rim "dah" cuts appear which are the lasting marks of a fight in which rival groups of villagers engaged

* See Chapter XIII on Bronze Drums, pp. 121-123.

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long ago, because some of those present expressed a decided preference for the musical tones of this drum over those of other drums belonging to members of neighboring villages.

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Although many who took part in some of the old funeral celebrations were undoubtedly under the influence of liquor and in a corresponding state of hilarity, funerals do not seem to have become the occasion of feuds or even of drunken brawls. Young people came together on more intimate terms at funerals than was permitted at other times, and some of their poems would not bear reproduction in print. Probably at times their conduct also went beyond the bounds of propriety, but such lapses seem to have been rare and bitterly regretted. However, it is clear that Karen mourners succeeded in drowning their sorrow and believed that by means of their festivities they had sent the spirit of their dead rejoicing on its way to its future abode.

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flying about a light people say: "Let the "k' las" of beasts and other creatures fall into the flame, but let the 'k' las' of men fly carefully and save themselves."

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Inanimate objects have their "k' las," as well as the lower creatures. Ownership in such possessions is duly observed by killing the pigs and fowls of a woman when she dies. The remains are thrown away or given to foreigners, who do not share the superstitions of the Karen. The paddy-cleaning implements and clothing of the deceased are either burned or buried with the corpse, unless they are laid on top of her grave. In like manner the oxen belonging to a man who has died are killed and disposed of, while his personal effects are burned or put in the grave with him. Otherwise, the owner's "k' la" might return to the village for his property and thereby bring calamity on the inhabitants.

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The idea seems to prevail among the Karen that the "k' las" enter and leave their bodies through the fontanel on the top of the head. In case a child falls and cries the mother will blow on this spot, in order to keep the life principle from escaping. However, the customary method of preventing the escape of the "k' la" is to tie a string around the wrists, either one or both of them, after fanning up the arms to blow the "k' la" back. Anybody may perform this act, but the services of elders or necromancers ("wi") are preferred.

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Another conception of the "k' la," quite distinct from that set forth above, is that it is a seven-fold spirit inhabiting the body, whose death it is constantly striving to accomplish through one or another of seven methods, namely, insanity, licentiousness, epilepsy, oppression, diseases, accidents, and injury by wild beasts. Even from the birth of a person the seven-fold "k' la" accepts the responsibility of causing his or her death and is engaged in constant struggle with that person's "so" (personality or character) for the mastery. As long as the "so" is strong, it serves as the individual's guardian angel; and he remains immune both from the attacks of the seven-fold "k' la" and from the magic arts of witches and necromancers. However powerful the charm that may be employed against him, his dominating "so" will ward it off; but if his "so" should become weak, he will soon lose his immunity.[15]

[15] See Dr. J. Wade's account in *The Karen Theasurus*, new ed., Vol. I, pp. 450, ff.

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774 he got a satisfactory divination, placed some rice, cooked chicken,
792 and liquor on a tray and drew it along the floor of the house to the
755 top of the ladder at the entrance. He then ran a string from the tray down the ladder to the ground for the old woman's "k' la" or shade to come up on. The "k' la" did not return because, as the witch-doctor explained, it was held captive in a betel-box by some one. Thereupon, he asked for seven cubits of white cloth, wound it about himself, and lay down to sleep with a "dah" (large knife) and an axe on either side of him. With the shades of these tools in hand his "k' la" was to go and release the shade or spirit of the grandmother. On awaking, the witch-doctor reported that he had had a hard struggle and been shot at by the man who was restraining the old woman's spirit from returning, but that he had succeeded in releasing it. When the doctor unwrapped himself, so the granddaughter of the patient told me, the cloth was riddled with what appeared to be shot holes. The string on the ladder was broken, showing conclusively that the "k' la" had returned at last. A piece of this string was now tied around the patient's wrist to prevent her spirit from again escaping. Needless to say, the old woman recovered her health.

764 A ceremony is sometimes observed among the Karen to keep
789 the "k' la" of a deceased person from aimlessly wandering about and to beguile it into remaining with the corpse, until it shall depart to the king of spirits. In this ceremony the coffined body is placed in the center of the floor. A slender rod of bamboo is inserted in a hole in the coffin lid, a thread reaching from the tip of the bamboo to the floor. This thread has small tufts of cotton and bits of charcoal tied to it in alternate order throughout its length. Under the loose end of the thread a small cup containing a hard-boiled egg is placed. A silver or brass ring hangs at the end of the thread just over the cup. In case the thread is drawn downward with some force so that it vibrates or breaks, the "k' la" is supposed to have returned from its wanderings, otherwise not. Colonel MacMahon relates that he watched an experiment of this kind, but that when he required everybody to go a considerable distance from the cup, nothing happened.[1]

826 Among the Karen and Burmese the abdomen is held to be the
828 seat of the passions and the diseases, varying moods and bodily

[1] A similar ceremony is gone through at noon of the last day of the funeral rites. See *ante*, p. 257: Col. A. R. MacMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 138; Cross, in the *Journal, American Oriental Society*, Vol. I.

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348. KAREN WITH DECOY-COCK.

Men and women labour out-of-doors till about sixty. The oldest women who can move make their daily journey for water, which is fetched and stored in joints of the giant bamboo. Old men occupy themselves with plaiting mats and baskets, and repairing gear. None are idle. The Karéns are acquainted with the medicinal virtues of many plants, such as bitter barks for ague. But all sickness and misfortunes are ascribed to the *nats*. Offerings and charms are relied on more than medicines. When a person dies, the body is treated with great respect, and every kind of offering is made to propitiate the spirit. The corpse is cremated, and the bones are buried at a place devoted to this use (*ayò-daung*), often at a distance, owing to the migrations of villages. Here a shrine is erected, consisting of a miniature hut, upon which a rude carving of a bird always figures. This symbolizes a mythical creature which conveys the spirit over rivers and chasms on its wanderings. For some time after a death, cotton threads are stretched beside the footbridges for the spirit to pass by on, without meeting the living. A shrine similar to that at the *ayòdaung* is made at a place where two roads cross, and at each shrine the clothing of the deceased, and sometimes new clothing and utensils, are dedicated. It is at funerals that the dreary Karén music is chiefly heard. The tones are very widely contrasted. The dirge is accompanied by the notes of the *pàzi*, a great drum of bronze, cast in the Shan country, in a single piece, though the metal is only the eighth of an inch thick. The *pàzi* is struck on the end with a padded hammer for the deep fundamental tone, and flicked on the side with a stick to bring out harmonics an octave or two higher.

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347. DECOY-COCK IN THE CIRCLE OF SNARES.

000 The *Karennî*, or "Red